

Department of Veterans Affairs
CARES Commission
VA Medical Center
1400 Blackhorse Hill Road
Coatsville, PA. 19320

August 28, 2003
Mayor Joseph Capozzolo
Bangor, Pennsylvania

Subject; Request to support adding a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Bangor Borough Northampton County.

Sirs,

It is with deep conviction that I present this testimony to request your support and assistance in securing a formal commitment from the United States Veterans Administration to establish a permanent CBOC in the Borough of Bangor, Northampton County, PA.

At present our Veterans and their dependents must travel 40-46 miles to reach the nearest Medical facility (outpatient clinic) located at 3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA. In addition if a Veteran were in need of more advanced medical care, the nearest VA Medical Hospital is 72-83 miles from Bangor Borough. Average travel times for Veterans from Bangor to Wilkes-Barre=1 hour 55 minutes. average travel time Bangor to Allentown=1 hour 5 minutes,


Since January, 2002, the Bangor Borough Council voted to assist United States Veterans in two areas of need in keeping with President Bush's request that we all contribute to Homeland Defense.

Area One is defined by the request made to our State Representatives, Mr. Richard Grucela and Mr. Craig Dally, and Mr. Ron Pennypacker of the Governor's Office for Veterans Outreach and Assistance. We have combined our individual efforts to assist Veterans as a unified body. This effort has established a central location provided by the Borough of Bangor at the Bee Hive Community Center (town hall). This service has helped over 1,350 Veterans from the County of Northampton and four surrounding counties, on a "once a month" basis. Our group recently established the Slate Belt Veterans Association office at 121 Broadway in Bangor. This gives Veterans a place to turn to on a daily basis. Since its dedication on August 4, 2003 by Senator Arlen Specter, this office has helped over 25 Veterans. Most Vets who came for help need medical attention, but we have also helped with transportation, education, services awards upgrades, pension and other areas.


It should be noted that Northampton County has a population of approx. 267,300. The VA reports the county had 26,098 Veterans in 2001; that figure has risen over 31,000 currently. The 15th congressional district had a pop. of 565,798 in 2001, with the Veteran pop. over 61,000. It should also be noted that these numbers are increasing at a higher rate than almost all areas of the country. This increase can be attributed to Pennsylvania having the highest number of active-duty personnel, and also the migration into Pennsylvania of Vets from New York and New Jersey. This migration is also at the highest rate in the country due to our close proximity to the Delaware River, and quick

travel time to New York City.

The second area that Bangor Borough Council has approved to assist our Veterans is to explore the feasibility of building a CBOC on a vacant tract of Borough-owned land. This tract is centrally located in the Slate Belt next, to Bangor Veterans Memorial Park, which was established to honor Veterans in 1950. This property has all utilities on site (sewer, water, electric, gas, etc.). Bangor also has 24 hour, 7 days a week police and fire protection. This location is one block from state route 512 and a few blocks from route 191, with easy access to route 33, route 78, and interstate 80. It should also be noted that the Borough spent 5 million dollars to upgrade the park and surrounding area 5 years ago. The park provides a swimming pool, football stadium, baseball, soccer, and field hockey fields, and other recreation areas. These facilities could be used by the VA for rehabilitation purposes.



Bangor Borough Council is open to the idea of a land donation of several acres on the above-described property that will be required to build a Veterans Medical Facility in the Borough. This precedence has been well established in other areas of the state. At present Bangor Borough has the highest tax rate in the county and a large debt which was incurred with the renovation of the park. The creation of a federal employer located in Bangor will bring needed economic stability and tax relief to the community. The additional benefits that will be derived from such a project are too great to list at this time.



The above-described project has proceeded to this stage through the support of many groups and individuals. Foremost is the VISN 4 planning initiatives and proposed responses. It has been recommended in the eastern market that a new CBOC be added in Bangor, Northampton County. This has the support of the directors of the Wilkes-Barre Hospital. This outpatient clinic will help relieve some of the patient backlog at the hospital. It will also allow the facility to focus on acute care and inpatient services.

This project has also received the endorsement of all of the municipalities in the Slate Belt, State Representatives Dally and Grucela, State Senator Lisa Boscola, Northampton County Council, U.S. Representative Pat Toomey, U.S. Senators Arlen Specter, and Rick Santorum.

We have also spoke in front of the State Veterans' Commission, and at its April 4, 2003 meeting, the SVC voted unanimously to support a new CBOC in Bangor.

In closing, what this all boils down to is NEED! The Veterans of Northampton County and five other counties need this expansion of medical care. These Vets have come to us expressing their health needs over and over again. The time has come to build this CBOC in Bangor Borough and meet the needs of these brave men and women. With your help we can help our United States Veterans and their dependents for generations to come. I humbly ask for your support and I thank you for allowing me to speak today.

